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Toxic dumps a step closer to cleanup

Three local sites are in the running for Superfund money

By COLE G. LIBBY
Banner staff writer

Bennington is home to three of the six toxic wastes dumps being considered for Superfund cleanup money next year, Environmental Protection Agency officials revealed Thursday.

The Bennington landfill and dumps at Burgess Brothers and Tansitor Electronics Inc. all remain on the list after the EPA reduced the numbers of areas allowed to compete for the money in 1988.

There is no guarantee, however, that any of the sites will make the final Superfund priority list and receive cleanup money, said John Malter, chief of the Hazardous Waste division of the state's Agency of Natural Resources.

"We do not know what the EPA will do on these sites," he said. "Some sites may be on the list, all may be on the list, or none."

Other sites on the list are the Browning Ferris Industries landfill in Rockingham and the Darling Hill dump and the Parker landfill, both in Lyndonville.

State officials will be in town Jan. 19 to tell selectmen what the nomination for cleanup means, according to Town Manager Kevin D. Ryan.

The three Bennington sites contain a variety of industrial wastes including PCBs, heavy metals and toxic solvents; the dumps are no longer in use.

Ryan said it would be premature to pinpoint the problems at the

Bennington landfill but a industrial waste pit separate from the trash disposal area has been the focus of state attention in the past.

According to a report in the Banner in 1986, the Agency of Environmental Conservation named Johnson Controls, (formerly Globe Union), BenMont Corp., Bijur Lubricating and Jard Inc. as the four largest users of the Bennington landfill site off Houghton Lane.

Tests in early 1986 showed a significant amount of toluene, an highly toxic organic solvent. A state funded test in 1976, shortly after the waste pit was closed, also showed a high concentration of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Environmental officials are concerned that the materials in the site may leach into ground water and migrate, possibly contaminating wells. More than a dozen wells in and around the landfill have been installed to determine if the toxins are moving.

"I don't have a reason to believe there is any immediate health threat," said Ryan Friday evening. Ryan said he had received a large packet of information for the state on Thursday but had no chance to review it.

The Burgess Brothers landfill was last used in 1976 by Union Carbide (now Eveready Battery) which had contracted with the construction firm to deposit waste from the battery-making process.

It contains many heavy metals
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including zinc, mercury, lead, caustic soda, manganese dioxide, zinc chloride, lubricating oils, weak acids and ammonium chloride. The dump was also used for inert materials such as paper, plastics and glass.

The dump is on the north side of Burgess road on the Woodford-Bennington town line.

The existence of the toxic waste dump did not contribute to Burgess Brother's decision to close its construction dump in December under pressure from the state, according to Vice President James Sauer. According to a Banner report in 1979, Union Carbide used the site from 1971 to 1976 when they discovered some of the waste leaching into a small unnamed stream nearby.

Despite the leaching and the materials in the dump, Sauer, who lives a quarter mile from the dump, said he was not concerned.

"If I was I'd move," Sauer said.

Carroll Killen, Tansitor Electronics vice president and general manager, said he was not sure what was in his company's waste dump.

"It might be sulfuric acid," Killen said. "It's been closed many, many years. What's in there I haven't the slightest idea."

Killen said he had not heard from the state about the plans for the site that is on a hill behind the West Road capacitor manufacturer's plant. A pond below the site has been fenced off because the waste pit had leached into it, Killen said.

Don Smith of the EPA's Boston office said a proposed list of national sites would be available sometime this winter. The list is subject to 60 days of public comment before the EPA makes a final decision on sites.

Malter said the EPA selected the Vermont sites from a larger list the state had submitted.

He said some of the sites not selected for consideration this time could be reexamined for nomination later.

Jonathan Lash, secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources, cautioned that nomination to the EPA list does not mean a speedy cleanup.

"I'm concerned that the EPA is overburdened," he said, noting that cleanup has yet to be finished on two Vermont sites on the federal Superfund list in 1981. Those sites are the Burlington Barge Canal and the Springfield landfill. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Bennington LF
Burgess Bros
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